

Community Health Center opens on Day Street

NORWALK

By CHASE WRIGHT

Hour Staff Writer

Area residents are all smiles now that a Day Street dental center has expanded to include additional health services for medically underserved populations.

The Day Street Community Health Center -- formerly Norwalk Smiles -- opened Tuesday with a ribbon-cutting ceremony at 49 Day St. Visitors were welcomed with a tour of the new center, which now offers primary medical, dental and behavioral health services for all ages.

"We're really excited about this expansion," said Mark Masselli, president and CEO of Community Health Center, Inc. "Day Street is a great location. We're right in the heart of SoNo."

As a private, nonprofit agency, CHC offers primary care in 12 Connecticut cities, delivering services at 173 locations to more than 100,000 patients statewide, Masselli said.

The \$805,000 project in Norwalk began in June with the renovation of 5,000 square feet of unoccupied, first-floor space. The Day Street center, which currently serves about 6,000 area residents, will double its capacity with the recent expansion, Masselli said.

The agency started in Norwalk in 2006 by providing dental screenings to children enrolled in the Norwalk Economic Opportunity Now Headstart program, said Adele Gordon, director of CHC's Fairfield County sites.

It wasn't long before the agency realized the growing need in Norwalk for primary care services to the city's uninsured and underinsured populations, she said.

According to the 2000 Census, about 75 percent of South Norwalk's 22,000 residents live at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. The area has been designated both a Medically Underserved Population and a Health Professional Shortage Area, according to the federal government.

"Our population is one that needs a lot of care," Gordon said. "Obesity, diabetes and hypertension: The three main areas of concern in this country, and Norwalk is no different."

The expansion includes 11 new medical exam rooms, a behavioral health group room, a new medical laboratory and a pod where doctors, nurses and medical assistants can discuss patient care.

The ability to work in a collaborative environment is what inspired Dr. Lori Weir to leave a private medical practice in New York and serve as the lead family physician at the Day Street Community Health Center.

She described the health center as "a medical home" that offers a wide variety of services to underserved individuals in the Norwalk community.

"We want this to be a home where people can access a great number of their services," she said. "Dental and mental health are closely linked with overall health. We offer everything here."